Grade 5

Module 1: Classroom Environment, Student Engagement and Commitment to Learning

Indicator 1: Creating a class climate that is responsive to and respectful of the learning needs of students with diverse backgrounds, interests and performance levels

Goal: I will learn about and implement positive reinforcement strategies for fostering appropriate student behavior and as a result students will transition from lessons and work independently to maximize instructional learning time.

Summary: During the first week of school, my students and I discussed, created, and signed a "Class Constitution" with six expectations and consequences that they and myself agreed to follow. In doing so, all students know what is expected of them in the classroom and school setting as well as what the consequence will be for failing to do so. Students are reminded of these expectations throughout the day in order to ensure effective lessons and maximized instructional learning time. Presently, four students are still in need of constant reminders regarding expectations and appropriate behavior. They have great difficulty working independently and following directions during the independent practice of our Literacy Block (the Literacy Block entails whole group, small group, and independent practice). Due to these distracting behaviors, I often have to stop working with my Guided Reading Groups in order to redirect their behavior, refocus the students they just disrupted, and control the noise volume about 3-4 times during each 25 minute Guided Reading Group. In doing so, I lose about 5-7 minutes from each Guided Reading Group block. I implement the school-wide positive behavior support system that rewards students with tangible incentives when they reach a goal of 10 stars for being "safe, smart, and respectful". There are still four students who do not respond to this incentive.

Reflection Paper: As a first year fifth grade teacher, I knew I needed to focus on behavior management. After reflecting on my current practice and reviewing the profile continuum for each indicator, I selected Indicator Four, which promotes a positive learning environment through students' positive behaviors, aligning with the rules in the classroom. Aware of the fact that behavior strongly impacts instruction, I knew I would need to improve students' behavior to support an effective and productive learning environment.

I began my new learning by asking for an experienced teacher to come visit my classroom and suggest management strategies I could implement based on what she observed in my classroom. Following her observations, she noticed I had already posted classroom expectations and consequences in the form of a Class Constitution, Cooperative Group Work Expectations, as well as Meeting Rug Area Expectations. She referenced the behavior management system I had in place in the form of a vertical color chart. In this system, students start on the green square "I am being safe, smart, & respectful". When their behavior is not reflective of this statement, they are given a

1

verbal warning and their name is placed on the light blue square, "I need to redirect my behavior and make a choice that is safe, smart, and respectful." Continuing to make poor choices will result in their name going to the dark blue square, "I need to brainstorm ways in which I can turn around my behavior." At this color, students are given a form to help them identify what they are doing wrong, the reason for doing it, those affected, as well as what they can do to change their behavior. If student behavior does not improve, their name will go to the red square in which they will go to office. This vertical color chart serves as a visual directly reflecting the students' behavior. Students do have the ability to move back up the chart should their behavior improve. I made this decision as I have put such an emphasis on the ability to "start over fresh" throughout the day. The experienced teacher left me with two questions that really got me reflecting on my management strategies. The first question was, "How consistent are you in using the behavior management system?" and "What are you doing to acknowledge the positive behaviors in this room?" In other words, it was clear to her I had definite ways of handling the negative behaviors causing too much of my energy and focus to be on negative behaviors and I was not commending the positive behaviors displayed by many of my fifth grade students.

With positive reinforcement strategies at the forefront of my mind, I turned to an article in the publication *Beyond Behavior*, "Using Effect Instructional Delivery as a Classwide Management Tool" (Haydon, Borders, Embbery, Clarke, University of Cincinnati). Among the many strategies discussed throughout this article, giving high opportunities to respond (OTR) or interact to promote student engagement and count downs are ways to promote active participation. I learned to reflect on the statement the experienced teacher instilled in me. "Before you look at the behavior, look at what you are asking the students to do." In other words, if the students are not given engaging activities and tasks following interactive lessons then their behavior is going to be a reflection of that. I went through the literacy stations I had created, adding and incorporating more engaging activities, which promoted critical thinking and more interaction between students. I also held students more accountable for their work by requiring them to write responses to certain stations in their Stations Notebooks which I collect every Friday and given them a grade of how their notebook work reflects whether they chose to use their station time diligently.

In doing so, I am no longer constantly reminding students of the time they are wasting nor directing their attention to the specific station they are to be at. Rather, they know the grade they receive at the end of the week will reflect their choices at Stations during the week. I have seen significant improvement in student behavior and work. Giving each of them a notebook has gotten them to be conscientious of their schoolwork. They write much more neatly and strive to finish the work as they know I will be reviewing it. Additionally, I have especially noticed two students, C   and R   working more independently and productively. Initially, I would have to remind them about 4-7 different times during stations to make better decisions and focus on the specific task on hand. Now that they are engaged in more interactive activities and are held accountable for their work completed at stations, I remind them about 1-2 times during the stations block instead. This has allowed me to provide the Guided Reading groups with more of my undivided attention, maximizing instructional learning time with my small groups.

Count downs, such as counting down five seconds, or repeating direction three times is a strategy I learned in that article as well as from the numeracy coach. I have been closely working with her to create engaging math lessons that promote mathematical talk and discussions on task. She came into my room to teach a lesson, which I learned a lot from mathematically but also a lot from in regards to management strategies. She explicitly shared her thinking with my students from beginning to end. In doing so, they knew exactly what was going to happen, presently happened, and what had just happened. For example she stated, " I am going to call up each pod number by number. When I do, I would like you to put your notebook on the table, and silently come to the rug, sitting on your bottom with your hands folded in your lap." She even stated that she would repeat the directions three times before she expected everyone to be in place. I learned from her that it would be more realistic to allow students three times to complete a task than say something once and expect they are all in their place. The three times prevents me from having to remind students to do what is being asked, direct their behavior, and speak to them about why they did not follow the directions where the focus would be on negative behaviors.

I implemented this technique and found that by stating directions three times, I could employ positive praise. According to another article in *Beyond Behavior* titled, "Creating a Positive Classroom Atmosphere: Teachers' Use of Effective Praise and Feedback" (Conroy, Sutherland, Snyder, Al-Hendawi, Virginia Commonwealth University), I learned praise must be intentional, overt, prompt, direct, specific, and positive. In addition to these six characteristics of praise, I learned it must occur frequently and consistently within a safe, supportive, and positive classroom environment. Mindful of this newly learned information, I offered positive praise by saying statements such as "Thank you K   for putting your notebook away and quietly coming to the carpet in an efficient manner." or "I really appreciate the way M   is sitting at the carpet on her bottom with her hands folded in her lap." In doing so, students that were lagging behind or tempted to fool around noticed the praise I was providing for specific students doing as they were asked and began to follow in their lead. This especially worked for D   , one of the four students who is in constant need of redirection.

The next technique I wanted to focus on was the transitional phase between stations. Instead of taking two minutes as planned for students to transition from one station to another, it has been taking about four minutes, with me constantly reminding students of what they are expected to do, redirecting their behavior, and getting them refocused and on task through individual directions. I observed an experienced teacher during the transitional phase of his stations rotation. The first technique he used was verbally sharing the expectations of students before they transition. This reminded students of what they were to do and how they were being expected to do it. The second technique he used was having a group of students model how they would transition from one station to another. I was especially fond of this second technique as it not only served as a model for how all students were expected to transition but also praised those students that already do transition as expected of them. By referring to them as role models and giving them positive attention for doing an exceptional job transitioning, other students would strive to be role models so they too could have a chance to demonstrate transitioning for the class at another time. I employed both of these

3

techniques into the transitions during the literacy block in my classroom and found that students did exactly as I hoped. Over a two week period (10 times), I found that about 6-7 of those times, the students responded much more positively, striving to be in the "role model group" to demonstrate how the class would transition. In addition, I found they responded much more effectively to proactive positive and polite phrases as opposed to instructions redirecting negative behaviors and poor choices. I found myself giving much more positive directions before the class transitioned instead of having to get students' back on track and refocused during the transition period. This technique allowed for transition time to be cut back down to the allotted two minutes instead of the four minutes had been taking. I will continue to implement both of these techniques as I know consistency is a strategy I know I must follow through with in order for any of my management techniques to be successful.

Continuing with positive reinforcement strategies, I met with a teacher going for his administrative degree. While he did observe that I did a nice job addressing many off-task behaviors using proximity or a stern "teacher look", he also observed that too much time was spent on addressing the negative behaviors instead of reinforcing the positive behaviors. Putting our heads together, we developed one plan I strongly believed in. Currently, I have my students in "pods" or groups of three desks together (there are seven pods in my classroom". These pods promote "talk on task" and cooperative learning during interactive lessons. I originally had pods of four to five students but found that pods of three students allowed for me to have the most control in the classroom and still allow for as much cooperative group work as possible. After establishing the pods, I assigned a number to each pod (1-6). Each student was given a label to stick to his or her desk. When the students are doing as is of asked of them, doing something exceptionally well, and serving as a role model for the rest of the class, they are given a point. These points recognize individuals for their positive actions. However, at the end of the week, the pod with the greatest number of points receives a small, tangible prize. This promotes teamwork.

I had found this system to be extremely effective in promoting teamwork. Students are now quick to say to their peers in their pods, "Quick C   put your things away and get ready for stations" or "Stop talking Robert so we can all earn a point". These helpful reminders between peers are promoting independence and teamwork among class members. Not only are they working to earn points for themselves but also earning points to contribute towards a group total at the end of the week. In order to ensure collaborative teamwork among all members of our classroom community, I switch pods of desks every Friday. This system is not only maximizing positive reinforcement strategies but also collaboration and teamwork among all members of this classroom community (students and teacher).

Another professional resource I consulted was Robert Marzano's *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Promoting Student Achievement*. In Chapter 4 "Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition", it states that effective praise focuses the students' attention on their own behavior and ascribes success to effort and ability, therefore establishing a standard for future expectations. In other words, I learned that students must be aware of their own behaviors and through explicit, consistent, and

prompt praise, students will know exactly what they are doing positively and will be conscious of that specific behavior in the future. Using effective praise in a positive tone of voice is a technique used to foster independence as students learn to self-monitor.

I started sending home progress reports weekly informing parents of each student's behavior, academics, and homework. Two weeks in, I started addressing the progress reports to the students as well. I believe it is just as important for the students to know how they are doing. It gives them the weekend to reflect on their choices and plan on how they are going to approach the following week. While they know how they chose to act and work throughout the week, this progress report allows them to see how it affected the class community as well. One student, M   , even came to me and said "Can I have lunch with you to think about how I can act better?" This shows me she is internalizing her actions and how her behavior needs to improve. She is making an effort to change and most certainly I could not have been more pleased. It is my goal for my students to learn how to act appropriately, independently, and responsibly without constant reminders, tangible rewards, and even positive praise.

An important element of the progress reports I am now incorporating after reading about elements of effective praise in Marzano's book is follow-up with the progress reports. Yes, I may not that a student is not completing homework assignments 2-3 nights a week or constantly talking during stations and not using time diligently. However, I learned I cannot leave it at that. When I notice the student is changing their behavior (i.e. completing their homework 4 nights a week, talking less and using their time more wisely), I send home a positive note to both the student and parents informing them of this positive change I have noticed. This positive praise and follow-up informs all parties that I am noticing an effort on the student's part and acknowledging to all parties involved that I appreciate it. Students are now less fearful of receiving a progress report and know that even if it is not as they had hoped, they have the ability to change, start over, and receive positive feedback once they do so. Again, it is keeping the environment and communication positive.

Through talking with experienced colleagues, professional readings, and practice, I have learned the key to effective behavior management is fostered through positive reinforcement strategies. As I have been working to improve the consistency in addressing positive behaviors and successful completion of tasks, I have noticed less need for redirection, verbal warnings, and consequences. My tone of voice has also been much more positive. I continue to stress the importance of being able to "start over fresh" for students that do end up needing a consequence despite numerous attempts to redirect and improve behavior and choices. I will continue to acknowledge the positive behaviors I notice, use students as role models to model expectations, clearly articulate directions and expectations to students prior to beginning a transition or task, as well as count down by repeating myself three times before I expect students to be completely in place as expected. In doing so, this consistency will allow for me to continue developing a positive classroom community where engaging and interactive lessons and activities are used to maximize effective instructional learning time during the literacy block as well as throughout the day. I will continue to be consistent with my color chart behavior management board, progress reports, and positive, precise praise.